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Sen. Brown, agriculture groups call on governor to sign pollution prevention, renewable energy bill

LANSING – Sen. Cameron S. Brown and representatives of Michigan’s leading agricultural industries today called on Gov. Jennifer Granholm to approve legislation that will help Michigan farmers reduce pollution and odor while at the same time producing renewable energy.

Passed by the Senate Thursday on a 23-15 vote, Brown’s Senate Bill 538 will help Michigan farmers access loans for agricultural energy production systems.

“This legislation has a dual benefit,” said Brown, R-Fawn River Township. “Not only will it help Michigan’s second leading industry – agriculture – but it will also protect our state’s environment.”

Granholm vetoed similar legislation Brown sponsored in 2004.

“My office has spent the past year working with the Department of Environmental Quality, the Department of Agriculture, and our state’s leading agricultural interests to craft a bill that addresses the governor’s concerns while benefiting farmers and our environment,” Brown said. “I hope the governor takes this opportunity to support Michigan’s agricultural industry.”

Representatives of the Michigan Agri-Business Association, the Michigan Allied Poultry Association, the Michigan Milk Producers and the Michigan Pork Producers all joined Brown in signing a letter urging Granholm to sign the legislation. Michigan Farm Bureau also is sending a letter to the governor in support of the bill.

Methane digesters, one of the most common types of agricultural energy production systems, process animal waste using treatment technology that yields methane gas, and at the same time reduces the volume of solids and liquids. Other systems covered by Brown’s legislation include gasification and thermal depolymerization. All three systems neutralize harmful pathogens and reduce disturbing odors. The energy produced can be used to generate electricity for the local farm operation, or it can be sold on the energy market.

Environmental polluters will be barred from using Brown’s legislation. To be eligible for loans, applicants cannot have been found guilty of any criminal environmental violations within three years, or any civil violations with fines greater than \$10,000 within one year. Additionally, the loans would be restricted to farms that are verified by the Michigan Department of Agriculture under the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program.

“This bill ensures that only those responsible stewards of our environment will have access to loans,” Brown said. “And with these loans, they will be able to purchase equipment that will help them further protect the soil and water of Michigan. Additionally, they will be able to utilize a new, renewable energy source at a time when our nation is seeking such alternatives.”

(More)

SB 538 returns to the House of Representatives for concurrence before being sent to the governor.